

# Town Meeting



BULLETIN OF AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR

BROADCAST BY STATIONS OF THE AMERICAN BROADCASTING CO.



## What Can We Do To Get More Housing?

*Moderator,* **GEORGE V. DENNY, JR.**

### *Speakers*

**EDWARD R. CARR**

**JOHN C. TAYLOR**

**BORIS SHISHKIN**

**GLEN TAYLOR**

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### COMING

—May 15, 1947—

**Should We Continue the "Voice of America"  
Broadcasts to Foreign Countries?**

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### THE BROADCAST OF MAY 15:

#### "Should We Continue the 'Voice of America' Broadcasts to Foreign Countries?"

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The Broadcast of May 8, 1947, originated in the Homeward Gymnasium, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m., E.S.T., over the American Broadcasting Company Network.

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## *Town Meeting*



BULLETIN OF AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR

GEORGE V. DENNY, JR., MODERATOR



MAY 8, 1947

VOL. 13, No. 2

### What Can We Do To Get More Housing?

#### **Moderator Denny:**

Good evening, neighbors, and a very special welcome to our friends in Baltimore and Johns Hopkins University on the occasion of our first Town Meeting origination in your city.

Well, we didn't pick an un-lively subject, did we? Indeed, I know of few topics about which Americans are more irritated and bewildered. We just can't seem to understand why the most prosperous, most productive, and richest Nation in the world cannot produce homes for some millions of American families who want them and are ready to pay for them. It just doesn't seem to make sense.

Oh, yes, there is the matter of cost, but the common sense of the common man tells him that costs are too high—not only for houses, but for nearly everything else.

We somehow feel that we are at the peak of our inflationary period—high prices to you—and

nobody wants to take a chance on getting stuck with something that costs as much as a house or a new building. Yet, millions, literally millions, of people want homes and most of them are eager and able to pay for them. But how long will they be able to pay for them? If we have to wait until prices fall—and prices will fall of course, when millions are thrown out of work and start using up their savings, if any—is there no other way out of this dilemma?

When I was a boy on my uncle's farm in eastern North Carolina and a tobacco barn burned down, we invited all the neighbors in to a barn raising. We would cut down the necessary trees from the woods nearby, barbecue a couple of pigs, provide a couple of gallons of, ahem, fairly strong liquid refreshment, and by the end of the day, with the aid of some fifteen neighbors, we'd have a new tobacco barn. That was twenty-



five years ago, but they probably do the same thing now.

Most veterans of this war have seen some engineering units of the Army construct a whole city in a little more than a day. How did we get ourselves into the spot where we can't seem to build homes for millions of buyers?

Well, we've invited the counsel tonight of four experts in this field — a nationally prominent home builder of Washington, D.C., Mr. Edward R. Carr; a producer of prefabricated housing for builders and large industrial projects all over the country, Mr. John C. Taylor, Jr.; an economist of the American Federation of Labor, and secretary of the housing committee of that organization, Mr. Boris Shishkin; and an eminent member of the United States Senate, who has introduced a bill in that body to promote veterans' housing, the Honorable Glen H. Taylor of Idaho, who is generously pinch-hitting for Miss Helen Gahagan Douglas, who had to remain in Washington on account of a probable vote on the bill to aid Greece and Turkey.

Now, let's hear first from the President of the National Association of Home Builders, Mr. Edward R. Carr of Washington, D. C. Mr. Carr. (*Applause.*)

**Mr. Carr:**

Thank you, Mr. Denny. Yes, Mr. Denny, I am a typical home builder—one of many thousands

of builders in every city and throughout the country who have helped make this the best-housed Nation in the world; one of the men who produced more than a million low-cost houses for sale and for sale to warworkers during the war and who are now building homes for veterans.

As you say, a great many people are asking, "Why are we not producing more homes and producing them faster?" But remember, a year we completed nearly a million houses in spite of the worst handicaps that ever assailed builders.

We had heartbreaking shortages of building materials, serious labor problems, and literally hundreds of government rules, regulations, restrictions, and controls under OPA, CPA, NHA, FHA, OTC, RFC, and other alphabetical agencies that were always changing the rules in the middle of the game and still are. This year home builders would like to produce nearly a million housing units.

Now as to the cost of houses. Thirty per cent of the dollar goes to building labor on the site, 45 per cent goes to the lumber, plaster, brick, plumbing, and all the materials of which homes are constructed. Nearly 13 per cent goes to pay for the land and utilities which serve it. Therefore, only 12 per cent of the buyer's dollar

to the builder to cover his overhead and profit.

Eighty-eight per cent is spent for land, materials, and labor, the cost of which is in a large part beyond the home builder's ability to control.

The price of new homes has gone up less than the cost of many other things. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics figures for March, 1947, the cost of food has advanced 89 per cent since 1939, clothing has advanced 84 per cent, weekly wages in manufacturing industries have advanced 108 per cent. But housing costs have gone up only 79 per cent.

In spite of this, we home builders are determined that the cost of building must be brought down and we must reach our goal of one million homes annually as rapidly as possible.

Undoubtedly someone on this program will advance the theory that the Taft-Ellender-Wagner Bill will solve all the housing problems. This is certainly not the answer. Home builders throughout the country are not against this bill from a selfish profit motive because some of the fattest fees builders could make are in the building of houses for government.

But I ask you to think about this: The Taft-Ellender-Wagner Bill provides for 500,000 public housing units. These alone would not socialize housing, but neither would they begin to take care of

the lower-income group—the lower one-third.

There are approximately ten million families in this group, and won't you agree that once we start on this method of housing them, that all of them are just as entitled to have the government—and that means you—pay their rent as the first 500,000 families.

That *would* socialize housing. Every country that has tried it has ended up with some form of statism or socialism. England began with a little public housing and today for every private house built in England the government builds four. And that's not calling anyone a Socialist or a Communist.

How are we to get more houses?

1. The builders must, and I am confident that they will, recognize their full responsibility to continue to build to their maximum capacity. We must continue to build a good share in the lowest price ranges we can reach, and we must operate on a fair margin of profit.

2. The remaining government controls which have been hampering us should be removed immediately.

3. We must work toward stabilizing and lowering costs. Material manufacturers and suppliers through increased efficiency and competition must do their share to bring in line those materials which are still too high in price, and



along with sub-contractors must help us to reduce costs.

Most important of all, labor must realize that both on the building site and in the manufacture of materials, they play the greatest part and make up the largest item of cost. Building labor is getting the highest wages in the history of this country, but according to reports from many localities, it is producing far less than it did before the war. No economic system in the world can support this kind of thing.

Restrictive labor practices are cost inflationary and can have only one result. The cost of our housing will be too high for the public to buy and labor will price itself out of jobs.

We have no quarrel with labor and we believe in a high wage level, but we do demand a full day's work for a full day's pay.

Let's do this job as Americans. We excel any people or any system in the world today in high production at low cost. Let's not scream for more laws, more subsidies, and more government controls.

I've always heard that anything worth having is worth working for. There is nothing wrong with the housing industry that a lot of hard work and co-operation won't cure. And that goes for manufacturers, builders, government, finance, and labor. (*Applause.*)

### Moderator Denny:

Thank you, Mr. Carr, for forthright statement that sets well on the track of tonight's discussion. Mr. Carr has built homes all around the city of Washington and developed a model residential section in Alexandria, Virginia, where our next speaker, Mr. Boris Shishkin lives. Mr. Shishkin is secretary of the Housing Committee of the A. F. of L. and an economist of that organization. Mr. Boris Shishkin, what do you say to Mr. Carr's proposal?

Boris Shishkin. (*Applause.*)

### Mr. Shishkin:

Labor has no quarrel with builders, but it does have a quarrel with what Mr. Carr has said. Of course, Mr. Carr's National Association of Home Builders is itself in the business of building houses.

A look at their *Washington Letter* is enough to make it plain that in the last couple of years the Association's staff and members have been mobilized to accomplish just three things:

First, to kill all price controls something they helped to do successfully last year, and a little bit ahead of schedule for the good of the country.

Second, to kill rent control, they are doing a good job of that right now.

Third, to stop the community from doing anything to help

lieve the housing shortage or clean up slums.

More than nine million Americans—a great many of them veterans—have been wearily living in crowded squalor, hopefully waiting for the new homes they need.

Most of you have been hearing a lot of promises from home builders, material manufacturers, real estate men, and others—promises of a literal torrent of home construction the very minute the OPA is dead, the controls are off, and the producers and builders are left to themselves. You are still eagerly listening for the good news, but the news that you and I hear from day to day is pretty bad.

In March, 1947, with all price controls off and practically all other regulations removed, only four houses were begun for every five houses started in 1946, under the conditions of the then prevailing acute material shortages and the controls Mr. Carr described.

This last April, when the construction season was supposed to get into full swing, the volume of home building dropped even more. What happened? Just as soon as controls on materials were lifted, prices skyrocketed and the volume dropped sharply. The prices on new housing became too high for most everyone to afford.

Those who are most responsible for this final and deadly price spiral are trying hard to pin the blame on labor. But no sub-

stantial wage increases have taken place since last July. Lumber has gone up 50 per cent since that time, but carpenters' wages rose only 8 per cent in 15 months. Paint has increased 80 per cent, but no one can blame that on labor. During the whole of last year, all materials rose 32 per cent, while labor rose less than 15 per cent.

One of the chief reasons for the rise was the speculative boom in real estate. Builders were cashing in on boom profits.

Mr. Carr's own *Washington Letter* for April 24, shows what happened to the home builder's minimum house in the Southwest, since before the war. The cost of the house went up 80 per cent, while the builder's profit went up 112 per cent.

It is significant that on a large number of private and public housing projects, on which the latest reports are available, the labor cost in 1947 was between 30 and 33 per cent of the total cost, or just about the same as it was before the war.

Of course, we could do a number of things to get rid of the housing shortage. First of all, we could do nothing, as Mr. Carr seems to suggest, and let the boom-bust cycle take its course.

We could do worse. I suppose, we could, for example, deport all Americans who can't find a place to live. Or, we could just shoot the homeseekers, or we could do



any number of things of that kind, choices that might be considered seriously under a dictatorship only.

But we in a democracy know better. What we should do to get more housing is do two things and do them fast. One is to reduce prices. The other is to get busy and build more homes and better homes at a price which every American family could afford.

Millions of American families want large scale construction of rental homes now. They also want at least a million and a half good homes built every year to get rid of slums and squalor infesting our cities, to make their land fit for modern living.

Both these things can be accomplished under the American housing plan sponsored by Senators Taft, Ellender, and Wagner and backed by President Truman. The Taft-Ellender-Wagner Bill is as American as a town meeting on the village green or as a town meeting on the air. It would cost the Government only 150 million a year, half of what the Government spent in one day at the height of the war effort.

But it seems that a fair profit is not enough for home builders, real estate operators, and money lenders. They have spent millions of dollars a year to prevent the enactment of the bill. They are afraid that their bulging profits may be cut.

They are willing to have more houses built, but only on the condition that these yield high profits. They are opposed to building homes for families of all incomes. It's more profitable to build homes for the rich.

They are against the low-rent housing program of local housing authorities.

At a Senate hearing they were asked, "Why? Where are the families and children to go?" Said Mr. Deckman of the Home and Property Owners Foundation, "Let them go on relief."

Said Mr. West of the United States Chamber of Commerce, "The poor belong in the poor house."

This week, the United States Conference of Mayors said that "one day a million and a half veterans can afford nothing better than a slum dwelling — when they can find one. The mayors are right. They know their cities. That's why they are urging the enactment of the American housing plan embodied in the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill.

Along with them, millions of people see in the bill a practical plan to build more houses and better houses. Let us get Congress to put the American housing plan to work, but fast. (*Applause.*)

**Moderator Denny:**

Thank you, Mr. Shishkin. What do these Washington boys do know how to fight it out, don't they?



looks like we're going to have a lively question period.

Now let's hear a more conciliatory statement from the president of American Houses, Inc., who has made prefabricated housing for builders of great developments all over the country, including a large one on the outskirts of the City of Baltimore, and a second one which is now under way at Logan's Village. Mr. John C. Taylor, Jr., what can we do to get more housing here in America? Mr. Taylor. *(Applause.)*

**Mr. Taylor:**

Mr. Denny, I did not expect Mr. Carr and Mr. Shishkin to be in such complete agreement. I did not expect to be required to furnish the points of difference in our discussion.

As a matter of fact, the difference in thought between these two men has been amplified by the use of words. I know that each of them is as anxious as any of us to see a real housing program get under way.

Our first need in getting more housing is a longer range program than we have had to date. Building houses is a production job. To get results, continuing operations are necessary. When policy and rules are changed each year or so, it is next to impossible to plan for continuing operations.

Under such conditions of part time operation, we use the tools at hand part time and get only a

fraction of the houses we are capable of producing. What houses we get cost a lot more than they should.

I think that the experience of the past year illustrates this need. During most of 1946, the emphasis was placed on building houses for sale to GI's. Not much thought and very little emphasis was placed on rental housing.

By late fall of 1946, our government shifted the emphasis from homes to sell to homes for rent. Builders who had found it advantageous to plan and build under the GI Housing Program now, due to this change in policy, found it advantageous and wise to change plans and build for rent.

The change meant not only different plans but different financing and, in many cases, the selection and development of new sites. The house building industry had to make a complete turn around. This resulted in the delay of many weeks in getting our 1947 program under way.

Newspapers began to carry reports of quantities of rental housing to be built in 1947. Much was printed to the effect that the price of houses offered for sale was far above value. Many GI's decided to wait. In consequence, the sales of finished houses bogged down in many areas.

Builders found their capital and credit tied up in existing projects. This, of course, meant delay of

new starts. We have no assurance that government rules and emphasis will not be changed again and that by another year we will find ourselves in a similar position.

To have a long-range housing program, we must get the various groups interested in housing, including government, industry, and labor, all represented here, to agree on some major premise that will serve as the foundation of that program.

Unfortunately, there are many in our country who are opposed to any national housing program that makes provision for subsidized housing. There are always many who are opposed to any national housing program that does not emphasize subsidized housing. A program that will work needs the enthusiastic support of all groups, and our first step should be to reconcile these two views.

I believe that the people of this country should be and will be properly housed. What is paid for this housing will depend on what people can pay for housing and not on what houses cost. I am convinced that private industry should be given the chance to provide housing that will range down to a cost making possible rent or carrying charges which any income group can afford to pay. For incomes below these levels, some sort of subsidy is needed and should be provided.

I believe private industry should be given every possible tool to work with. The principle of first mortgage commitments, now possible under Title 6 of FHA, should be made a definite part of our long-range planning.

Now, gentlemen, I want to ask each of you a question. Mr. Shiskin, do you advocate subsidizing housing if private industry can supply housing to meet the needs of all income groups?

Senator Taylor, would you object to giving private industry every chance to provide all the housing needed if it can meet the price needs of all?

Mr. Carr, would you object to subsidized housing in cases where private industry fails to meet the need?

Why, then, gentlemen, can we not get a reconciliation of our opposing views—a long-range housing program? When we do, we will house America. I believe we can. (*Applause.*)

#### **Moderator Denny:**

Thank you, Mr. Taylor. Our next speaker is one of the most vigorous and energetic members of the United States Senate. When Mrs. Douglas, he introduced a bill for veterans' emergency housing. He is Senator Glen Taylor of the State of Idaho, on the Democratic side of the Senate. (*Applause.*)

#### **Senator Taylor:**

I thank you. Mr. Denny, the moderator, is one of the most

men I know. (*Laughter.*) He makes a living by hunting up people who disagree and then having them go on the radio and fight it out. Sometimes I suspect he may be the originator of our "Get Tough With Everybody" foreign policy. (*Laughter.*)

However, before I get tough or disagree with anyone tonight, I want to agree with one of the previous speakers, Mr. John Taylor. Now, there's no collusion between John and me even though we both have the same last name. But I do agree with John when he says that what we need to get more housing is a long-range housing program in order that this big job may proceed without fear of the rules being changed in the middle of the game.

On the other hand, our friend, Mr. Carr, seems to have no concrete proposals to offer, whatever. He says we should bend every effort. Now effort-bending is fine exercise, but—(*laughter*)—by just telling builders that they should bend every effort doesn't guarantee that they will.

And when Mr. Carr tells us the remaining government controls which have been hampering us should be removed, well, it seems I've heard that before. Everybody with anything to sell told us that if we would just remove price controls, prices might go up a little, but they would come right back down and everything would just be fine.

I protested when it was first suggested that the allocations and controls over building materials be removed. However, they were removed but had to be reinstated after a brief period, during which much damage was done to our hopes for housing.

I protested against—and voted against—removal of price controls. However, Congress saw fit to amend the life out of OPA and the President had to bury the corpse.

As a result, the prices of everything, including building materials, have gone sky high and our hope for a home-building boom is blowing up in our faces.

No, removal of controls is not the answer. It would simply result in the inadequate supplies of building materials being diverted to the nonessential construction of beer gardens, juke joints, and other quick-profit ventures.

Two million families are doubled up with other families or relatives in our country at present. Five hundred thousand marriages occur each year. Our housing problem is the worst in history. It is an evil which can well undermine the very foundations of our society.

Nothing can fray people's nerves and promote the growth of discontent like bad housing conditions. I know from recent experience. When Mrs. Taylor and I came to Washington in 1945, we could not find a place to live.



No landlord would rent us anything because we had two small boys. We had to live in a hotel for five and a half months.

Now my wife and I have never had a really cross word in all our married life, but we certainly were biting our tongues to keep from saying mean things to each other after nearly six months in a hotel with two frisky boys.

We solved our problem by borrowing money and making a down-payment on a \$15,000 house, but how many people can afford such a solution. Frankly, we couldn't either. (*Laughter.*) But we would have sold years off our lives to get a place for those children to play.

The basic feature of the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill is this: It proposes to help private enterprise to build, sell and rent housing at prices and rents that wage and salary earners can afford to pay.

For the lowest-income people, it proposes that the Federal Government take over part of the cost of housing. Citizens can get decent houses whenever enough of them want decent housing badly enough and say so loud enough to be heard above the special lobbies now operating in Washington and throughout the Nation yelling "Communist" and "Socialist" at everyone who wants our Government to do something before it is too late.

Conservative Senator Taft is one of the sponsors of the housing bill. For that spark of humanity, the real estate lobby is calling even Mr. Taft a socialist. (*Laughter.*)

If the Taft-Ellender-Wagner over-all housing bill and the Veteran's Emergency Housing bill introduced by Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas and myself aren't passed, it won't be just a lucky accident for the real estate and construction interests. It will be because they planned it that way. It will be because veterans and their families and the people who saluted the veterans as heroes two years ago didn't speak up loud enough and often enough and in great enough numbers.

Private planning for housing is the "trickle down theory." Let private enterprise build for those most able to pay. They will move leaving houses vacant for the next layer who will move up, leaving older houses for others, and so on down the line to the slums.

Is this to be the reward for our boys for saving freedom—from foxholes to slums? I don't think so. I don't think America will stand so. I think we will give the right answer if not now, then in 1945 (*Applause.*)

#### **Moderator Denny:**

See what I get for saying something nice about a United States Senator. But never mind, he's good sport for coming over here at the last minute to pinch-

for Mrs. Douglas. Senator, we're delighted to see in the audience tonight a woman responsible for your great success and those two fine young boys. Mrs. Taylor, stand up and let this audience greet you. (*Applause.*) We're awfully glad they found a place to live.

Now, gentlemen, we've talked a lot about cooperation here tonight. So will you cooperate with me and join me up here around the microphone. I think we're entitled to hear first from Mr. Carr. He can speak his mind and lash out at any of the people here on

## THE SPEAKERS' COLUMN

**BORIS BASIL SHISHKIN** — Mr. Shishkin, economist and research director of the American Federation of Labor, was born in 1906 in Odessa, Russia. He came to the United States in 1923. In 1930, he received an A.B. with honors from Columbia University where he continued to study as a graduate student. He became economist with the American Federation of Labor in 1933.

Under the NRA, Mr. Shishkin was labor advisor on lumber, aluminum, and shipping. At various times he has been member of the National Industrial Relations Board for the Cleaning and Dyeing Trade, member of the President's Advisory Committee on Unemployment Census, consultant of the U. S. Housing Authority and the Federal Public Housing Authority, labor advisor for the Office of Production Management and the War Production Board. Since 1942 he has been a member of the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice. He is the author of several labor problem pamphlets.

**JOHN C. TAYLOR**—A native of Shade Gap, Pennsylvania, John C. Taylor, Jr., was graduated from Princeton in 1918 with a Bachelor of Science degree. He was employed by the Taylor-Wharton Iron & Steel Co., starting as a plant hand and working up to sales manager and a member of the board of directors and vice-president. He was elected president of American Houses, Inc., January 1, 1939.

American Houses, organized in 1932, pioneered in industrial large housing projects all over the country. Besides projects of local builders, it has provided prefabricated housing for employees of large companies in developments created by the companies. Thousands of homes have been built by American Houses in many parts of the United States. The company has several plants strategically located for mass development projects.

**EDWARD R. CARR**—Mr. Carr, one of the country's leading community developers,

is president of the National Association of Home Builders. He was born and educated in Washington, D.C., but before World War I, he worked on the *New Orleans Item*. During the war, he served with the U. S. Marine Flying Corps.

In 1926, Mr. Carr, entered the building business. He developed several residential sections of Washington, D.C. His chief interest has been in providing desirable community living conditions in the lower priced brackets. Mr. Carr has always advanced the rights of private enterprise to improve the country's housing at all income levels.

Mr. Carr has held many offices in the National Association of Home Builders. Much of his work with the Association has been in the fields of veterans' housing, slum clearance, and urban redevelopment.

He is immediate past-president of the Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Washington.

**GLEN H. TAYLOR** — Born in Portland, Oregon, in 1904, Glen Taylor is now a Democratic Senator from Idaho. Educated in the public schools in Idaho, he became a sheet metal worker's apprentice in 1919, but in 1921, he joined a dramatic stock company of which he became a partner in 1922. Since 1926, he has been in the entertainment field as owner and business manager of various enterprises. During the war, from 1942 to 1944, he went back to his trade in sheet metal as a mechanic in an ordnance plant in San Francisco.

Senator Taylor began studying economics and government because of hardships endured and the suffering of others which he witnessed in his travels during the depression. He ran for Congress in 1938 and was fourth in a field of nine in the primaries. When he ran for United States Senate in 1940, he was nominated but defeated by 14,000 votes in the General Election. For United States Senate in 1942, he was nominated but defeated by 4,000 votes in the General Election. He was elected to the United States Senate in 1944.

the platform that he wants to. Mr. Carr.

**Mr. Carr.** Well, meet part of that building lobby, folks. I didn't know before how many bad horns we wore, but I want to say this much that I am rather proud that we fought against socialized housing. I continue to fight against it.

They say we haven't any plan. Well, we do have a plan. Maybe they don't know this, but we've been studying it for years. Recently we've been putting a lot of study on it, and here's one thing that we found out. We found out that the new family formation in this country drops down to 400,000 a year, approximately, starting next year. From that time on, if we build a million houses a year, which we are capable of doing, then we can start to get at the clearance of slums and housing these people that they are so very anxious to take care of in the Taft-Ellender-Wagner plan.

Now, I'd like to point this out to you, that there's only one thing we need do that we haven't done in the past. That is, to apply the same principle of getting rid of old houses that we apply to getting rid of jalopies when they become dangerous on the road. If we enforce our health and safety codes just as well as we enforce our inspections of automobiles and drive those houses off the road, then production will cure the housing problem of this country.

One and a half per cent of the housing that will be provided for the slum dwellers through the Taft-Ellender-Wagner Bill would do it much good. (*Applause.*)

**Mr. Denny:** Thank you, Mr. Carr. Senator Taylor has a comment on that.

**Senator Taylor:** Well, what Mr. Carr has said is that we don't need so many houses, because so many people aren't going to get married from now on. Well, I don't blame them. I wouldn't get married either if I had to sleep out on a park bench some place. (*Applause.*)

He says that building 500,000 homes isn't going to furnish homes for everybody that need them, so why build any homes at all. If you can't build enough for everybody, why just let everybody go without. He says, "Condemn the old houses." Just burn them up, tear them down. Well, no, Mr. Carr, it isn't like an old car and I'm not speaking of your car. I mean the automobile. (*Laughter.*) It isn't like an old automobile. If you take the man's car and throw it in the junk heap, he can at least go home and sleep there, but if he hasn't got a home to go to, he's really in a bad shape then, when he hasn't an old car or an old house either.

**Mr. Denny:** Well, now, you Mr. Carr, speak up.

**Mr. Carr:** Well, Senator, to the least, you have a great se



of humor, but I wish you wouldn't read things into what I said that I didn't say. I said that we need a million houses a year in this country, and I said that as soon as we got enough housing on the market so people had a place to move, that we could get rid of the ones that are substandard. That's all there is to it. We have to get the houses on the market and we realize it and we'll do it.

**Mr. Denny:** Thank you. Now, Mr. Shishkin.

**Mr. Shishkin:** You know, when I was making these possible alternatives of what could be done, I didn't realize then that Mr. Carr would take me so seriously about cutting down the number of people in order to house everybody properly.

But the important thing—and it's very serious, because the situation is extremely serious and very urgent—is that we know of record that before the war, for twenty-five years, we have had a terrific housing shortage. The private enterprise hasn't done it. We want the private enterprise to succeed. But we don't want the private enterprise to come out now, under Mr. Carr's leadership, and say, within two or three years, "we've failed," so that when the depression comes the private enterprise will be wrecked because of its failure.

The small help that is given in

the bill is no danger, but a great support to the enduring progress of private enterprise as the main leader as provided in the bill for the production of housing which it cannot do without public aid and particularly community planning, in order to have the community developed soundly, properly planned, for everyone and not only for the rich. (*Applause.*)

**Mr. Denny:** Thank you, Mr. Shishkin. Now, Mr. John Taylor, how about a word from you?

**Mr. Taylor:** I just want to repeat that I think that if we do this job, it will be in the good old American way of teamwork, cooperative effort. It means thinking along the same lines. I repeat that until we get these two opposing views thinking together, working as a team, we're not likely to get the job done. (*Applause.*)

**Mr. Denny:** All right. Thank you. Now while we get ready for the question period from this very vigorous and interested audience of Johns Hopkins people in the City of Baltimore, I'm sure that you, our listeners, will be interested in the following message.

**Announcer:** You are listening to America's Town Meeting of the Air, brought to you by Town Hall and the American Broadcasting Company.

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Now for our question period. We return you to Mr. Denny.

## QUESTIONS, PLEASE!

*Mr. Denny:* Well, friend, how would you like to earn a \$210 set of the *Encyclopedia Americana*, just by using your head? Our local committee of judges is standing by listening for the question which the committee considers best for bringing out new facts and increasing our understanding of tonight's question. If you ask this question, provided it is limited to 25 words, you will receive a 30-volume set of the *Encyclopedia Americana*. So on your toes, now, let's get set, go, with the gentleman right over here.

*Man:* I'm a veteran. My question is addressed to Mr. Carr. Mr. Carr, how can we get maximum efficiency out of labor in the building industry under our present democratic system and why don't we do it?

*Mr. Carr:* I think that maybe Mr. Shishkin could answer that better. We'd like to get maximum efficiency. I think the reason you don't get it is because labor, according to Thurman Arnold who

is pretty much of a trust-buster, seems to have a monopoly. There's no way of getting at a closed shop unless there is something done with your labor law. (Applause.)

*Mr. Denny:* All right. Thank you, Mr. Carr. Mr. Shishkin, would you comment on that question?

*Mr. Shishkin:* I think that it's only fair to say that in the case of home builders who have just testified on behalf of Mr. Thurman Arnold, that the great majority of home builders who build homes which we are talking are employing not union labor but nonunion labor. It's also very interesting in Washington, during the last three months, if you read about the *Washington Star*, that the union home builders offered nonunion jobs for bricklayers. For example, were offering \$25 a day when the prevailing union wage under an annual contract was \$18 a day. So they are, themselves, you see, demoralizing the building market in order to get specu-

housing built quick, and at a high profit—at the consumer's assumption of the final cost. That is what is causing inflation and demoralizing conditions. Labor, when materials are coming, is doing all it can. Productivity has only been lagging when the brick, lumber, and other materials were not up on the site of the job. That is the only thing that has held up work and not the workers themselves. (Applause.)

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. The gentleman in the blue coat.

*Man:* The question is for Senator Taylor. If builders and unionists stopped behaving like businessmen and acted as men tired of indecency, wouldn't housing be more readily available?

*Senator Taylor:* If builders and who?

*Man:* Unionists.

*Senator Taylor:*—and unionists start acting like businessmen.

*Man:* Stopped acting like businessmen. (Laughter.)

*Senator Taylor:* Oh, stopped acting like businessmen. Well, now, that's a very vague question. Do you get the sense of it, Mr. Denny? Could you translate it for me, Mr. Denny, I don't—

*Mr. Denny:* Well, if I understand the gentleman correctly, he wants them to stop acting like—that's a derogatory remark about businessmen, is it not? (Laughter.)

*Man:* I included unionists.

*Mr. Denny:* Yes, businessmen and unionists, and started demanding more decent conditions—

*Man:* If these men would be willing to give a little bit to each other, wouldn't we get better housing?

*Senator Taylor:* No, I don't think that's it at all. The builders and the laboring men aren't having difficulties. It's just simply a question of not being able to get enough materials. There's too great a demand. And when Mr. Carr said he wants controls removed, remember this: We have had allocations. They wouldn't let them build unnecessary buildings—juke joints and one thing and another. There are pent up demands—requests for two and a half billion dollars to build these unnecessary buildings. If we take off controls, the building materials will go into that two and a half billion dollars worth of joints, and one thing and another. We won't have any houses for some time.

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you, Senator. Now, Mr. Carr has a comment.

*Mr. Carr:* Well, I think the Senator is a little confused on the decontrol bill, because it specifically prohibits, without special permit, race tracks and beer gardens and juke joints, but it does not prohibit necessary construction in the industrial fields. There's one thing I think you should all bear in mind, that you are never going to get the price of materials



down until manufacturers can make a full line. If they only make the material that goes into housing, the price of it is going to go still higher, because their molds and equipment are set to make up a full line of material. We're hoping that that will bring the price down by making that full line.

Now a controlled price is a fine thing, and a controlled low price is a fine thing, but you can't build a house out of that. It's got to produce the material and it didn't under the OPA, so in desperation we said we'll get OPA out of the way and let the law of supply and demand work as it has always worked in this country in the past. (*Applause.*)

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you, Mr. Carr. The gentleman in the aisle there.

*Man:* My question is directed to Mr. Shishkin. Will you comment on cooperative housing projects, such as the Bannockburn cooperative project in Washington, as an economic and democratic answer to tonight's question?

*Mr. Shishkin:* It's a very good example of the kind of housing that, on its own, labor organizations and other citizens' groups have launched, but it does need assistance of local communities and states and federal government, also. Mutual housing is one of the major programs which would be made possible by the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill. It provides for a maximum self-reliance

and there are today a number of cooperative projects throughout the country, which are a very important thing. In a cooperative project you are not tied down to one house. If you've got to move you can turn it over to somebody else and are free. The cost is therefore, lower in terms of both your investment and current expense for it.

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. The gentleman in the brown suit there.

*Man:* Mr. John Taylor, research on low-cost housing, long-range programming are all embodied in the Taft bill. Don't you think this is the co-ordinated effort that you advocate?

*Mr. Taylor:* I think it is long-range planning effort and for that reason I'm for it. But I think it tries to cover too much ground. It is too much of an omnibus bill. It leaves us with the impression that the housing problem is a complicated one. But I would be in it if I were in Congress. I'd vote for it because it is aimed at long-range planning.

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. The lady with the pretty pink flower on her hat. (*Laughter.*)

*Lady:* I'm addressing my question to Mr. Shishkin. If emphasis of new housing were placed on multiple units instead of single homes, would it not help to solve the immediate housing shortage?

*Mr. Denny:* If emphasis were placed on multiple units instead

of small homes, wouldn't it improve the situation?

*Mr. Shishkin:* Yes, the greatest need today, the current need is for multiple, rental units for rent because that is the current need, the kind of thing the veterans need most. Rental housing for veterans under the type of program which also could be immediately provided under the Wagner-Ellender-Taft bill would be the best answer today, before we get ready to start for the longer range plan for home ownership.

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. The gentleman over here.

*Man:* My question is directed to Mr. Carr. How soon do you consider that the law of supply and demand is going to supply us with housing?

*Mr. Carr:* The law of supply and demand is supplying you with housing right now. (*Voices from the audience.*) Well, I'll answer your question this way. I'm like Senator Taylor, I'd like a little interpretation on that one. I frankly think that by the end of another six months or a year that the critical need is going to be very materially reduced.

*Lady:* I am a teacher of Baltimore. My question is directed to Senator Taylor. Can you be more specific on what the average citizen can do to help remedy the housing situation?

*Senator Taylor:* Yes, I can. The average citizen can do something.

Get busy and let their Congressmen or Senators know how they feel about this, that they want housing built and try to influence them to get busy and pass this bill and get the program started.

I want to say that I have to disagree with Mr. Carr when he says that the law of supply and demand and private enterprise will do the job, because the National Association of Home Builders itself asked for re-establishment of controls on nonresidential construction late in 1945 after the lifting of wartime construction controls had squeezed them out of access to building materials.

Under the Wyatt program and under price control, production of building materials, as shown by the Department of Commerce, increased 67 per cent between January and October, 1946. Under the Wyatt program, starts of new permanent housing by private builders increased to 670,000 homes and apartments in 1946 from 299,000 in 1945—by far, the sharpest year-to-year increase in the history of the building industry.

Since the scuttling of the Wyatt program and the removal of price ceilings on materials, over-all production of materials has decreased 18 per cent; building material prices have increased 27 per cent, and housing construction has dropped below last year's level. (*Applause.*)

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you, Senator

Taylor. Mr. Carr has something to add here.

*Mr. Carr:* I just wish Senator Taylor would get the facts straight. We did ask for controls to be put back on after commercial construction had been given a 90-day start during which we were not able to build a house. They took off all controls and by that time all the material was gobbled up either by public houses or by heavy construction or by the United States Government, and we were left without anything. *(Applause.)*

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you. Here's Mr. Shishkin up here this time.

*Mr. Shishkin:* Just on the facts, I think we ought to have those in mind and bear them very clearly. Since the first of the year, the United States Government with all the aids and assistance, authorized the construction of 191,000 rental units, and there were only 35,000 started and that is despite the aid given so you can't certainly blame it on the Government, Mr. Carr.

*Mr. Denny:* All right. The gentleman in the loud checkered shirt. *(Laughter.)* It ought to be a good and loud question.

*Man:* My question is directed to Mr. John C. Taylor. How is your long-term plan going to help to get immediate cheap housing? Do you infer that the only other alternative is socialization?

*Mr. Taylor:* As I understand the question, you ask, do I think that

if we don't get a long-range program that we will need more socialized housing? Is that the question?

*Mr. Denny:* Is socialization the answer?

*Mr. Taylor:* No, I don't think socialization is the answer to the thing at all. I think the answer is cooperative effort—team work—pulling together.

*Mr. Denny:* No, he says is socialization necessary to get it now? Is that what you—

*Man:* The question is, you proposed a long-term program. I'm asking you how can a long-term program help immediately? And then, if the long-term program is the only other alternative to socialization, why not have socialization? *(Applause.)*

*Mr. Denny:* He's got four or five questions all wrapped up in one. Well, the first part of the question is the question of the alternative to your plan of long-term housing. What can we do to get housing now? That's the first question. The second half is almost another question. If you can get it in the long-term way, why not socialization? These New York boys have a way of double barreling their questions. *(Laughter.)*

*Mr. Taylor:* I'd like to take the second part of that first. I don't think you can get it by socialization. I think you're going to need cooperative effort on the part of all of the factors that produce



housing, whether the Government pays for it or whether the private citizens pay for it.

There are a lot of things that go into building a house. There are plans, land, money, architects and a lot of other people. It also takes money. Now you are not going to interest capital, you're not going to interest long-range planning, you're not going to interest people in doing large scale developments, if they think the rules are going to be changed in the middle. You wouldn't have much of a football season next fall if there was a threat of changing the rules every month.

*Mr. Denny:* All right. Thank you. Now the gentleman on the aisle here.

*Man:* Senator Taylor. The Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill, I believe, is for government housing projects. The question is, why do you believe federal job holders of doubtful ability would be more capable builders than men who have become successful in the construction industry? (*Applause.*)

*Senator Taylor:* I think you're kind of mistaken about the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill. It proposes to guarantee the mortgages for the private boys so that they'll go ahead and take a chance and build some homes. It doesn't propose to have the Government build the houses at all. When he says that I think government bureaucrats can do a better job than private

builders, it wouldn't have to be much of a job because private builders aren't doing much of anything at all right now. (*Boos and applause.*)

*Mr. Denny:* Thank you, Senator Taylor. Now our speakers will give their summaries on tonight's question. We're going to hear from both Mr. Carr and Mr. Boris Shishkin. First, a final word from Boris Shishkin.

*Mr. Shishkin:* Well, my discussion was a little rough and there were a few bumps but I don't think any of us got car sick as the discussion might have suggested. (*Laughter.*)

The point we attempted to make, and I think made pretty effectively here, is that we can't just sit with folded hands and nobody can afford not to contribute something very effectively to greater production both from labor, from home builders, from financial institutions, from real estate boards, and all those that need to contribute to the solution of the American housing problem.

We feel very strongly that the Wagner-Ellender-Taft bill is a very important solution. We are very much aware that there is a grave misconception, as the result of propaganda that has been put out at a cost of more than five million dollars a year by our friends here, so that people think that government employees — govern-

ment will directly build houses under that program. That's false.

Private contractors and private enterprise will build all of the housing under that program and only 125,000 units a year—not 500,000 units as Mr. Carr said; that's another example of the kind of approach—will be built with the aid of local communities. That is the program. It's a concrete positive proposal. It is something that we've got to have and we've got to start now. (*Applause.*)

Mr. Denny: Thank you, Boris Shishkin. Now for a final word from Mr. Carr—and he's not sick.

Mr. Carr: I don't know what they would do without my name, tonight, to have a little fun with. I'd like to say that when you throw out all the wild statements, the program does call for 500,000 houses—125,000 a year for four years, still adds up to 500,000.

Another thing, Senator Taylor and Mr. Shishkin apparently would have everybody in the country live in a new house. I don't care what you say about old housing. You might just as well say that the President has to have a new White House every year because we've been using it for 150 years. (*Applause.*)

I'd like to say that we are doing something about it. We're building houses. I don't think that we need the bill, the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill, but I do think we

need some real effort by labor. I think that they need to give a full day's work for a full day's pay. (*Boos and applause.*)

We need some real effort material producers to get stable and fair prices. We really need some real effort by builders to build more houses and to build all the houses they can as quickly as possible and as well as possible and as cheap as possible. (*Applause.*)

Mr. Denny: Thank you, Mr. Carr, Boris Shishkin, John C. Taylor, Jr., and Senator Glenn Taylor.

Well, what can we do about it? What do you want to do about it? It's up to you.

Now, next week we make our first visit to another great American city, Brooklyn, which we are proud to claim as part of Greater New York. We'll be the guests of famous old Plymouth church which is celebrating its 100th anniversary. There, we'll consider a question which is being hotly debated on the floor of Congress: "Should We Continue the 'Voice of America' Broadcasts to Foreign Countries?" What do you think about that?

Our speakers will be Senator Carl A. Hatch, Democrat of New Mexico; Ralph E. McGill, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*; Congressman John Taber, Republican

of New York, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee; and Frank Walker from the *Washington Times Herald*.

Tonight, our committee of judges awards \$210-set of the *Encyclopedia Americana* to Mr. Brennaman for his question, "How can we get maximum efficiency out of labor in the build-

ing industry under our present democratic system, and why don't we do it." Congratulations, Mr. Brennaman.

Thanks to the fine audience; our host, Johns Hopkins University; and Station WFBI.

We hope you'll plan to be with us next week and every week at the sound of the crier's bell.





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